Europe when he saw no security imperatives endangered. Poland and Hungary owed enormous sums to Western creditors. He could not rescue them from drowning in their own indebtedness when his own economy was buffeted by the fall in oil and raw material prices. Nor could he think of intervening abroad when his troops were returning from Afghanistan bloodied and demoralized and when Najibullah was still pleading for more trucks, fuel, ammunition, and weapons.

When Chancellor Kohl called on 11 November to assure him that West Germany did not want to destabilize East Germany, Gorbachev was grateful. He and Kohl agreed that they needed to stay in close contact. “Deep changes are underway in the world,” said Gorbachev. They could take different forms in different countries, and “be more or less deep.” But stability must be preserved and all sides must “act in a responsible way.” Yet he was uncertain how Kohl would behave. Three days later, Gorbachev telephoned French president Mitterrand. The flow of events did not disturb him except in one respect, he said. “I have in mind all the excitement . . . in the FRG around the issue of German unification.”

On 17 November, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze spoke more clearly on this subject to the Supreme Soviet. The processes occurring in Eastern Europe, he said, “are natural and historically conditioned. Democratization, the renewal of socialism, and the exercise of the peoples’ right to free choice are under way.” But the postwar territorial status quo must not be upset; two Germanies must remain. “The past must never be repeated. Europe and the world paid a high price for past mistakes. The Soviet people have not forgotten and never will forget history’s lessons.”

Soviet leaders regarded the division of Germany as a fundamental requisite of Soviet security. Over time, the division of Germany had mitigated their perception of threat. The absence of threat, in fact, enlarged the opportunities for reform, and the desire to reform reinforced their determination to lessen the threat they posed to others. But suddenly the specter of German power had reemerged. It “was obvious that the German question . . . touched emotional chords other European issues did not,” wrote Secretary of State Baker.

Two Countries Become One

On 28 November 1989, Chancellor Helmut Kohl of West Germany strained those chords. In a speech to the German Bundestag he outlined a ten-point road map to German unification. He talked about regulating travel and sharing technology. But he stressed that West German economic aid to East Germany would be forthcoming only if the East German regime agreed to hold free elections and dismantle its centralized planning. Once these steps were taken, the two Germanys could establish a “treaty community” and then design confederative structures that would eventually culminate in a federal system for all Germany. These steps should be coordinated with efforts to enhance pan-European structures and reduce armaments. “Nobody knows today what a re-united Germany will ultimately look like,” he said. “I am sure that the unity will come if the people of Germany want it.”

Hardly anyone else wanted German unity. Memories of the past haunted Europe. British prime minister Margaret Thatcher made clear to President Bush that she opposed it. So did the Dutch and Italian foreign ministers. Mitterrand was displeased with Kohl’s initiative but hesitated to voice his opposition openly lest he antagonize a West German friend whose collaboration he needed to promote further European integration.

President Bush was an exception. He despised the East German regime and believed German nationalism was a natural impulse that could not be thwarted. “While Thatcher, Mitterrand, and others feared that Germany might cause more trouble and tragedy,” Bush recalled, “I did not.” A newly reunited Germany, in Bush’s view, “would be different.” It would be democratic; respect existing borders; be anchored to the NATO alliance; be integrated into other supranational institutions; and collaborate with Washington. The day after Kohl’s speech, Bush called the German chancellor. A unified Germany, Kohl promised, would remain in NATO. Bush was reassured and said he would support Kohl. Over the next few months, he and Kohl spoke frequently on the phone. Their friendship grew as they labored to transform the landscape of Europe. Bush knew what he wanted and where he was heading. He was happy for Kohl to take the lead.

Not all of Bush’s advisers were enthusiastic. They worried about dangers and imponderables. “Suppose that [Kohl] decided he could get unification only by trading it for neutrality,” thought Scowcroft. The specter of a neutral,
powerful, unified Germany in the middle of Europe had been a recurrent nightmare of American and European statesmen since the very beginning of the Cold War.Bush, of course, was determined that there would be no neutral Germany. But how could they be sure?383

They worried, in part, about how the Soviet Union would react to Kohl's initiative. It would be hard for Gorbachev to swallow a unified Germany, let alone a unified Germany inside NATO, which would, wrote Baker, "alter the fundamental geostrategic, political, and economic architecture of Europe." The loss of East Germany and its absorption into NATO, Scowcroft realized, "would be fatal to post-war Soviet military strategy and tantamount to a shift in the tectonic plates of the alliances themselves. East Germany was the prize of World War II . . . . Losing it, and accepting that loss, would mean acknowledging the end of Soviet power in Eastern Europe and the complete erosion of Moscow's security buffer of satellite states, the very core of its security planning."384

Kohl was thrusting the issue of German unification on the international scene just as Bush and Gorbachev were readying for their first meeting, in early December in Malta. Notwithstanding the breathtaking events of the preceding months and the ongoing transformation of governments in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, U.S. officials were still wary of Gorbachev. They did not think his reforms would succeed, and they still were uncertain of his intentions. "I still believed Gorbachev remained a communist," recalled Scowcroft, "perhaps not inevitably wedded to the notion of inevitable conflict between the two systems, but quite prepared to take advantage of us whenever the opportunity arose." Gorbachev might simply be lulling the West into complacency. He was making a virtue of necessity, Richard Nixon wrote Bush, and that did not make him a virtuous leader. Beware!385

Bush was more optimistic, but still unsure. He prepared carefully for his meeting with the Soviet leader, wanting to put Gorbachev on the defensive. As their respective ships anchored in Malta's harbor, a terrible storm raged. Inside, the atmosphere, "while friendly, was not relaxed." Bush assured Gorbachev that he supported perestroika and wanted to plan for another summit in June. He raised some Soviet human rights cases, discussed the possibilities for expanded trade, and then pressed the Soviet leader to support free elections in Central America and to constrain Castro's adventurism.386

Gorbachev presented a more philosophical overview of the Cold War. "Today all of us feel we are at a historic watershed." New problems must be addressed. A new world was evolving. Cooperation had to supplant competition. "The United States and the USSR are doomed to cooperate for a long time, but we have to abandon the images of an enemy." The Soviet Union would never attack the United States.

Gorbachev then turned to Germany. "Mr. Kohl is in too much of a hurry. . . . This is not good," he said. Gorbachev still hoped that a reformed and reconstituted East German regime would survive. There "are two states mandated by history," he told Bush. "So let history decide the outcome." Bush promised that the United States would not act recklessly, but he did not oppose German unification. How did Gorbachev want to proceed? The Soviet leader talked vaguely about adhering to the principles agreed upon at Helsinki: preserving stability, respecting the balance of power in Europe, and reconfiguring their military alliances along more political lines. But he had no blueprint.387

On the German question there was no meeting of minds, but at Malta there was a meeting of hearts. Gorbachev and Bush talked candidly and openly to each other. Gorbachev felt that Bush was ready to cooperate, expand trade, and assist his initiatives at home. Bush felt that Gorbachev talked straight, even about the most sensitive topics, such as the turmoil in the Baltic republics, where Bush felt that Soviet use of force would "create a firestorm" and wreck possibilities of cooperation. Baker sent a cable to American ambassadors in NATO capitals: "We believe [that Gorbachev is] firmly committed to perestroika—that gives us a very good chance to improve dramatically—even transform—the East-West relationship."388

Gorbachev returned to Moscow to face unprecedented problems. His economic initiatives were floundering—worsening, rather than improving, people's living conditions. His political reforms were sparking dissent and eroding his prestige. His attempts to accommodate the demands of subject nationality groups were scorned by ethnic patriots in the Baltic and the Crimea and ridiculed by Russian nationalists. His closest associates were losing faith in him.389

And now he could not escape dealing with the future of Germany. His frustration, indeed his anger, flared when he and Shevardnadze met with Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the West German foreign minister, on 5 December. Gorbachev felt betrayed, he told Genscher. In previous meetings, he and
Kohl had built an understanding: they had talked about how World War II had affected their lives and shaped the destiny of their countries; they had reflected on the obligation they shared to heal old wounds, and the opportunity they had to plan a more hopeful future. Now Kohl had shattered these expectations by spouting a plan for German unification without consulting him. East Germany was still a sovereign state, Gorbachev insisted, and Kohl was crudely interfering in its domestic affairs, treating the people of the GDR as if they were his own citizens. This was “blatant revanchism.” “Even Hitler did not allow himself anything like that,” Shevardnadze interjected. When Genscher tried to explain, Gorbachev snapped: don’t even try to defend him. Kohl’s plan for unification was a “political miss,” he declared, and warned: “[Y]ou can spoil everything that we have created together. . . . You have to remember what mindless politics led to in the past. . . . Everybody can see that Chancellor Kohl is rushing.”

“The German issue is a painful one,” Gorbachev said to Mitterrand in a meeting the next day. But not even Gorbachev could deny reality. East Germans wanted unification. “The majority of the people in the German Democratic Republic no longer support the idea of two German states,” Hans Modrow, the East German communist leader, told him at the end of January.

Gorbachev and Shevardnadze had talked for years about their respect for self-determination. They now had to decide if they would use force to thwart the will of the German people. Should they do so, they would violate their most fundamental principles and besmirch perestroika. Secretary of State Baker witnessed the “emotional weight” of this wrenching issue as he dealt with Shevardnadze. “You know how proficient the Germans are,” Shevardnadze said to him. “They have tremendous creative potential. But they also, as we have seen in the past, have tremendous destructive potential.” He could not forget “the memory of two world wars unleashed by Germany, especially the last war, which cost our country 27 million lives.” Nor could he forget the personal anguish of that war, the deaths of his brother and uncles.

At a four-hour meeting with their closest associates on 28 January 1990, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze wrestled with the issue of German unification. Grudgingly, they acknowledged it could not be stopped. Instead of opposing it in principle, they would try to work with Kohl. He was projecting unification as an integral part of an all-European vision, a concept championed by French president Mitterrand and comporting with their own ideas about a common European home. The Soviet leaders decided that the World War II allies—Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union—should establish a process, along with the Germans, Kohl and Modrow, to determine the future of Germany.

In February, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze told Secretary of State Baker that they were ready to participate in what came to be known as the Two Plus Four process. The task was to reconcile Germans’ legitimate right to self-determination with the other four nations’ security requirements. In a speech to the Canadian parliament, Shevardnadze lucidly outlined the challenge of dealing with “two truths”: “No one doubts the right of the Germans in the GDR and the FRG to self-determination. But equally certain is the right of Germany’s neighbors and the European states to have guarantees that a united Germany, if it is created, will not be a threat to them, that it will not raise the question of a review of European borders, and that Nazism and fascism will not revive in it.”

Soviet and U.S. leaders agreed that a united Germany needed to be bound by supranational institutions and structures. “[W]e needed a safety net which would protect us and the rest of Europe from any ‘surprises’ from the Germans,” Gorbachev told Baker. But the appropriate security mechanisms, he stressed, “should be provided not by NATO but by new structures created within a pan-European framework.” What he meant by this was unclear: he had no real plan.

The issue of German unification cast a pall over Soviet politics. Old-line communists charged that Gorbachev was intending to destroy the leading position of their party, institute a multiparty system, embrace private property and a free-market economy, and allow the breakup of the Soviet Union itself. In the Politburo and the Central Committee, opponents of change attacked Gorbachev and Shevardnadze mercilessly. The German issue was particularly disquieting because it had such a loud resonance. “We should not overlook the impending danger of the accelerated reunification of Germany,” said Yegor Ligachev, an influential member of the Politburo, who was increasingly disaffected with Gorbachev. “It would be unpardonably shortsighted and a folly not to see that on the world horizon looms a Germany with a formidable economic and political potential.” There must not be an-
other Munich, he intoned. "I believe the time has come to recognize this new danger of our era and tell the party and the people about it in a clear voice." 396

This criticism shook Gorbachev and Shevardnadze. In May, they rebuffed a package of security assurances that Secretary of State Baker brought to Moscow. A unified Germany within NATO, Baker said, would not be allowed to develop or possess any nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. Its army would be limited in size. Its existing border with Poland would be guaranteed. In addition, NATO would be reorganized into a more political than military alliance, and NATO forces would not enter former East German territory for a number of years. German-Soviet economic ties would be nurtured, and new pan-European structures would be created through procedures that comport with the Helsinki Final Act. 397 Although these security assurances were significant, they did not satisfy Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, who continued to be assailed by officials in the foreign ministry and the Soviet military establishment. In May, while Gorbachev celebrated the anniversary of the victory over Nazism, many hard-liners and some moderates quipped "that the Soviet Union was capitulating to Germany forty-five years after the end of the war." 398 Baker left Moscow on 19 May with an overriding impression that Gorbachev was feeling squeezed. . . . Germany was over-loading his circuits. I had believed that Shevardnadze was more emotional and less logical on Germany than his boss, but . . . both of them were having trouble squaring the circle. I felt they trusted us and trusted the German leadership and oftentimes seemed on the verge of accepting Germany in NATO, only to have their political sense or historical memories pull them back. 399

Gorbachev flew to the United States at the end of May for his summit with President Bush. He now had more friends in Washington than he had in Moscow, and he needed American help, badly. Over a number of days, including a relaxed interlude at Camp David, he talked with great candor about his problems. He wanted his American interlocutors to understand just how far he had gone and how much farther he hoped to travel to reshape socialism and nurture democracy in the Soviet Union. He was caught in a terrible vise by Lithuania's threat to secede and his opponents' demand that he preserve the unity of the Soviet Union. Personally, he was of two minds—understanding a people's right to self-determination but despairing over the impending disintegration of the nation he governed. He elicited Bush's empathy and invited his assistance. He wanted a trade treaty. He looked for progress on the strategic and conventional arms-reduction agreements. Nobody listening to Gorbachev could think that he regarded the United States as an enemy or doubt that he believed the shared interests of the two nations trumped their differences. But he was negotiating from a position of weakness, and he desperately needed diplomatic achievements to sustain perestroika. "The phase of perestroika that we are now going through is probably decisive," he told Bush. "The difficulties will be fundamental. . . . Different republics may have different relationships, but our basic decision is for a market economy." 400

Gorbachev's desperation was most apparent when the two leaders turned their attention to the German question. "Germany could be in both alliances or neither," Gorbachev said. "Either would be acceptable to the Soviet Union, but a Germany only in NATO would unbalance Europe." Bush tried hard to dissuade Gorbachev, employing one line of argument after another. Did he not agree that peoples could determine their own future? Did he not agree that the Helsinki Final Act permitted nations to choose their alliances? Did he not think that the people of a united Germany should have the right to choose what they wanted to do? 401

"To my astonishment," Bush recollected, "Gorbachev shrugged his shoulders and said yes," the Germans should have the right to choose. The room fell silent, and Bush repeated his inquiry. Gorbachev assented a second time. A din arose as Gorbachev's advisers started whispering angrily to one another. The "dismay in the Soviet team was palpable," wrote Bush. "Akhromeyev's eyes flashed angrily." As Gorbachev continued to speak to Bush, members of his delegation snapped at one another. "It was an unbelievable scene," Bush remembered. "I could scarcely believe what I was witnessing," commented Scowcroft. 402

As the dissent flared, Gorbachev tried to qualify his position. He did not repudiate his statement but instead talked about a long transition period and
the need to assuage Soviet insecurities about the rebirth of German power, whether as an autonomous nation or linked to a hostile alliance. Such thinking recalled Soviet fears at the onset of the Cold War.

But much had changed. Gorbachev’s mind-set was not that of Stalin, or Malenkov, or Khrushchev, or Brezhnev. He did not assume that all capitalists were mortal enemies, nor did he regard the United States as a future adversary. Like Shevardnadze, he had liberated himself from ideological stereotypes. “Pseudo-ideology” had impoverished his nation. The United States needed to be viewed as a potential partner rather than as an inveterate foe. Accordingly, Gorbachev reversed himself. It was in the interest of the Kremlin, he said, to have U.S. troops stay in Europe. His subordinates might shudder at such an idea, but he now regarded NATO as an instrument to keep the United States involved in Europe, an insurance policy against the latent power of a unified Germany.

Gorbachev’s thinking about Germany had evolved in significant ways. This was apparent in his meetings with Chancellor Kohl and Foreign Minister Genscher and in his conversations with Bush. Gorbachev had fumed when Kohl made his statement to the Bundestag on 28 November, but now he could talk sharply to Genscher precisely because he believed trust had developed between them, though he worried that the trust might be very slim. Still, it endured, sustained by Kohl’s and Gorbachev’s recognition of their mutual interests and by Gorbachev’s capacity to recast his perception of threat and imagine a different historical trajectory. “Germany can be trusted,” Bush had assured Gorbachev. “For fifty years there has been democracy in Germany. This should not be ignored.” The Germans had learned from history, Gorbachev acknowledged. A bourgeois, democratic neighbor, however powerful, could be peaceful, could resist its militarist past.

Kohl traveled to Moscow in mid-July 1990 to see if he could negotiate a treaty governing relations between a unifying Germany and a rapidly changing Soviet Union. During the previous weeks, NATO leaders had agreed to recast the alliance along more political and defensive lines, and the governments of the Western industrialized nations had decided to make credits available to East European governments and the Soviet Union if they continued to make the transition to free-market economies and open societies. Kohl, therefore, had more leverage to deal with Gorbachev than Bush had had in May. But Gorbachev’s position also had been strengthened, at least momentarily. At a stormy meeting of the twenty-eighth Congress of the CPSU in early July, his comrades endorsed Gorbachev’s political changes and reaffirmed his leadership of the party. When Kohl met with him, Gorbachev conveyed more self-confidence than he had for many months.

His confidence was not arrogance. He and Kohl chatted emotionally about transcending their pasts and overcoming traditional hostilities. “A special responsibility falls to our generation, to people of our age,” said Kohl. “We did not fight in the war, . . . but we remember the war, we saw its horrors.” Gorbachev agreed: “The current generation . . . [has] a unique experience. We have felt the chance that has opened. Our generation can still make a statement in history . . . We have felt that we are one civilization.” Later on, he repeated: “We can’t forget the past. Tragedy entered each one of our families . . . But it’s time to turn our faces toward Europe, to take the path of cooperation with the great German nation.”

Talking to Kohl, Gorbachev reaffirmed his new attitude toward the presence of U.S. troops in Europe. They could play a stabilizing role. He was pleased, moreover, that the NATO powers had agreed to restructure the alliance. “The transformation of NATO is apparent,” said Gorbachev, “as is its emphasis on a political accent in its activities. A great step towards casting off the fetters of the past [has been taken]. . . . The fact that the West does not see the Soviet Union as an enemy has great importance for the future.”

Recasting the enemy image meant that Soviet leaders had more room to maneuver at home, more ability to pursue reform, and more leeway to shift resources from the military establishment to civilian sectors. The “basic mission” of Soviet foreign policy, Shevardnadze reminded his colleagues in April 1990, was to create “the conditions most conducive to internal transformations in the country.” Their goal was to ensure that external circumstances “are nowhere an impediment to our perestroika.”

This attitude shaped Gorbachev’s approach to the treaty negotiations with Kohl. He wanted to protect Soviet security, deflect domestic criticism, gain financial assistance, and most of all, sustain his floundering perestroika economic reforms. He agreed to a united Germany in NATO. In return, Kohl promised that Germany and NATO would provide the assurances that Baker had outlined months before: German troops would be limited in size; the sphere of NATO activities would be restricted to the former West Germany, so long as Soviet troops remained in the eastern part of the country be-
It was Gorbachev who ended the Cold War. Among all the leaders we have examined, it was his thinking that shifted most fundamentally. He came to feel that Soviet security was not endangered by capitalist adversaries. Nor were there many opportunities for communist advances abroad. He could focus, therefore, on restructuring communist society in the U.S.S.R.

Gorbachev would not have persevered had he not found empathetic interlocutors in Washington. Ironically, Reagan's greatest contribution to ending the Cold War was not the fear he engendered but the trust he inspired. At the time Gorbachev took office he was told that America's rearmament effort had reached its peak and was likely to be constrained thereafter by economic woes, fiscal exigencies, and political partisanship. Gorbachev was not awed by America's power or Reagan's ideological zealotry, but he was impressed
with the president's personal character, political strength, and desire to elim­
inate nuclear weapons. Reagan seemed to want to get to know us personally,
Shevardnadze recalled. While "adhering to his convictions," Gorbachev
wrote, the president "was not dogmatic." He wanted to negotiate and coop­
erate. Most of all, Reagan had the trust of the American people. The Soviet
leader knew that if he struck a deal with Reagan, it would stick.414

To his relations with Reagan, America's most renowned ideologue, Gor­
bachev could apply his own considerable personal skills. He could try to
shatter the image of the evil empire, and to a considerable degree, he did.415
But the substantive outcomes were always on American terms, since Reagan
did not compromise much. Yet Gorbachev was not unhappy with the rela­
tionship because the summity had bestowed a more benign image on him­
self and his country. With time, he hoped, he would gain the opportunity to
shift resources, nurture his perestroika, and create a system of democratic so­
cialism worthy of example.

Gorbachev wanted continuity with Reagan's successor and welcomed
Bush's victory in the 1988 elections. Although he was irritated by Bush's pol­
icy reassessment, the two men subsequently developed a rapport with one an­
other. Bush was not the ideologue that Reagan was, nor did he have the same
political base. But Gorbachev liked Bush's cautious, prudent demeanor. The
new president did not rub Gorbachev's nose in his defeats. He did not talk
flamboyantly or arrogantly. "I have conducted myself in ways not to compli­
cate your life," Bush said to Gorbachev. "That's why I have not jumped up
and down on the Berlin Wall." "Yes, we have seen that," retorted Gorbachev,
and "appreciate" it.416

The affection that characterized Gorbachev's relations with Bush and,
even more, the warmth that developed between Baker and Shevardnadze
were conditioned by the weakness of the Soviets' position domestically and
internationally.417 They were supplicants. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze
made most of the concessions. At the outset of the Cold War, Truman had
said that there could be cooperation between Moscow and Washington if the
United States got its way 85 percent of the time. Now that was happening.
Rather than compete for the soul of mankind in a global competition, Gor­
bachev wanted mostly to rekindle the real promise of communism, now
reconceived as democratic socialism, in the Soviet Union. To do so, he
needed to end the Cold War.

CONCLUSION

The Cold War was not predetermined. Leaders made choices. During the
Second World War, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin, and Winston
Churchill were besieged by competing impulses and clashing priorities. They
distrusted one another. Yet as allies they labored diligently at wartime confer­
cences to modulate their differences and plan for victory and peace. As the
most horrible war in history came to an end, leaders in Washington and
Moscow, including the untutored and provincial Truman and the evil and
paranoid Stalin, recognized that cooperation was preferable to conflict. So
did their successors.

Cooperation might mean collaboration in preserving the peace when the
advent of atomic weapons made war even ghastlier than before. It might
mean collaboration in punishing and controlling foes whose eventual revival
was taken for granted and whose long-term behavior was a frightening im­
ponderable. It might mean collaboration in reconverting wartime economies
and reconstructing devastated areas. Moscow might receive reparations from